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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0821  
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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0858

C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000003

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL OFFICE DIRECTOR SPEAKS ON FAILED REGION INITIATIVE AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

REF: A) 08 BAGHDAD 03870; B) BAGHDAD 00102; C) BASRAH 0001

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REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C/REL MNFI) Summary: REO met with Basra Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Hazim Jodah on January 20. Jodah declared the failure of the federal region initiative and blamed Basra Governor Mohammed Wa'eli for its demise. Commenting on the elections, Jodah assessed the local security situation as favorable and expects high voter turnout on January 28 and 31. He expects no problems during the election period and predicts gains for Da'wa and the Iraqi Islamic Party. End summary.

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Region  
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¶2. (C/REL MNFI) In a meeting with us January 20, Jodah commented on the failed initiative to create a federal region from Basra Province, which had been championed by Governor Wa'eli (See reftel A). In spite of a 35-day collection period -- including a five-day extension -- only 32,441 of the 141,000 signatures needed to trigger a referendum had been collected when polling stations closed on January 19. Jodah never doubted the initiative would fail, claiming it was obvious just days after polls opened. He added that when Governor Wa'eli (Fadhilah) recognized the obvious lack of public support, he waged a publicity campaign to encourage interest. In spite of spending USD one million, he was unable to motivate voters and, rather than face defeat, requested IHEC to abandon the campaign. Jodah refused, citing Iraqi law. According to Jodah, the Governor reacted to this refusal by blaming IHEC for the low number of signatures collected up to that point. Jodah extended polling center hours and prolonged the collection period by five days, but the concessions did little to help the campaign. Jodah blamed the campaign's ultimate failure on Waili's widespread unpopularity.

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Elections  
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¶3. (C/REL MNFI) Jodah was confident that elections on January 28 and 31 will go smoothly, adding that he was unaware of any potential problems. He positively assessed the local security situation, commenting that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are sufficiently strong. He said his biggest challenge had been finding enough staff to work the polling stations, but that the problem was now resolved.

¶4. (C/REL MNFI) According to Jodah, 75,000 individuals, including security force personnel, medical workers, inmates and detainees, are registered to vote in the special election on January 28. 34 voting centers, nearly the same ones used during the federal region campaign, will be open that day.

¶15. (C/REL MNFI) Jodah reported that 1,434,000 voters are registered for the main election on January 31. He opined that voter interest was very high and predicted a turnout of 80 percent or more.

¶16. (C/REL MNFI) Jodah was hesitant to predict election outcomes but stated that Da'wa party would likely gain one or two seats on the Provincial Council (PC), due to Prime Minister Maliki's popularity. He added that the Iraqi Islamic Party, which was subject to a Sunni boycott during the last local election, had improved its chances by distancing itself from Tawafuq. Commenting on the Sadrists parties, Jodah said that two, the Free People's Trend (284) and Integrity and Building (376), were competent and should enjoy a fair amount of support on election day (See reftel B). He did not attempt to hide his contempt for the Sadr al-Iraq party, however, whose members he described as "criminals."

¶17. (C/REL MNFI) Comment: Governor Wa'eli's unpopularity played a major role in the campaign's defeat, but most Basrawis in principle favor the eventual creation of a federal region. REO contacts generally agree that the process should be delayed, however, to allow time for local government institutions to strengthen.

¶18. (C/REL MNFI) Comment, continued: Jodah maintains close contact with REO and UK FCO and is regarded as a capable manager. In spite of the disruption caused by the federal region campaign, IHEC appears to be ready for election day. End comment.

NEGRON